

259/85C

*No. 10/10/86*

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- 1. Mr. Bell
- 2. PS/Secretary of State (L&B) *M*

- cc PS/Mr Scott (L&B) - *M*
- PS/Dr Mawhinney (L&B) - *M*
- PS/PUS (L&B) - *M*
- PS/Mr Bloomfield - *M*
- Mr Brennan
- Mr A Stephens - *M*
- Mr Elliott - *M*
- Mr Cilliland - *M*
- Mr Chesterton
- Mr Spence - *M*
- Miss Elliott
- Mr McConnell - *M*
- Mr Ehrman

*W.P.*

MC 9673 - THE MONDAY CLUB

I attach a draft reply to Mr Storey's letter of 4 February. I am grateful to Mr Ehrman for his suggestions.

*D Hill*

D A HILL  
SIL

24 February 1986

Thank you for your letter of February 4th, about the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Before explaining more fully our position on the Agreement, I would like if I may to say something of the background, because that is the context in which it must be considered. When we began our negotiations with the Republic, there had already been over a decade of stalemate between the unionist and nationalist parties within Northern Ireland. All attempts since 1974 to set up a devolved administration on a basis that would be broadly acceptable to both communities had failed.

Faced with the severe difficulties of achieving political progress through the Province's own political parties, we felt that we had to examine how else we might bring this about. Our purpose in doing so was not to replace the search for internal progress with the quest for an external solution. It was rather to achieve some relief of the problems facing Northern Ireland, in the hope that this would in turn encourage political progress within the Province.

Throughout the negotiations we made absolutely clear that it must be for the people of Northern Ireland to decide the future constitutional status of the Province. Within that boundary, we sought to find a way of giving the unionist and nationalist traditions in Northern Ireland greater confidence in the future. We wanted to assure them that there was a role for both to play in Northern Ireland in a fair and just society. We wanted to show them that there was scope for both to develop their particular talents, skills and interests. But

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equally we had no intention of putting pressure on either to change their aspirations and allegiances, provided that they were peacefully pursued. We hope thereby that they might be emboldened to inch away from their traditional, defensive and exclusive political positions. We wanted to encourage the constitutional parties to start to work out how they could administer Northern Ireland together.

The Agreement itself, as you no doubt know, has three main elements; first, both the British and Irish Governments affirm that any change in the present status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of the majority of people in Northern Ireland, and both further recognise that the present wish of a majority of the people is for no change in its British status. Under the Anglo-Irish Agreement, therefore, Britain will retain full sovereignty over Northern Ireland, for so long as that is the wish of a majority of its people; and the Irish Government has formally and bindingly accepted that. So there is no question in this Agreement of nudging Northern Ireland into a United Ireland against its will, nor of in any way undermining the Unionists' British Birthright.

Second, it makes provision for the improvement of cross-border security, and for enhanced co-operation between the security forces of the Republic and the UK.

And third, it sets up an Intergovernmental Conference, the purpose of which is to help reconcile the nationalist community in the Province to the existence and government of Northern Ireland, by offering the Republic the right to express its views on those aspects of the Province's affairs that particularly affect the minority.

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The only people who stand to lose from this are the men of violence. In the long term it is they who will be undercut by a reduction in the level of distrust in the Province; they who will lose if the minority community can be reconciled to the institutions of Government, and Northern Ireland can return to greater stability and prosperity.

Of course, no single Agreement or form of administration can solve all Northern Ireland's problems. But the aim of the Agreement is to provide a stable basis on which to build increase co-operation and understanding between both communities in the Province; and I hope that all people of goodwill in Northern Ireland, and throughout the British Isles, will come to accept it as that.